Remarks to D11 School Board

re: Student Publication Policy
date: November 6, 1996

My name is Jody Alyn. I am here tonight as a District 11 parent of two elementary-age children who will probably go to Palmer High School. I have been asked to speak not only as a parent but as a Board member and representative of Citizens Project.

First, I must congratulate everyone in this room who worked so hard to get the bond issue passed. From Board members to students, from Frank Whitworth to Will Perkins, and including us parents, faculty, staff, and concerned citizens in between--we worked hard and worked together to accomplish something that we all knew to be in the best interests of our children. May that be the value that prevails tonight and throughout this process.

I support the publication of the Lever article entitled "Finding true love: Gay teens search for a place". I found both the article and the accompanying commentary--which I read--to be in full compliance with the Colorado Student Free Expression law (Colorado Revised Statute 22-1-120).

This law states:

> "The general assembly declares that students of the public schools shall have the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press, and no expression contained in a student publication, whether or not such publication is school-sponsored, shall be subject to prior restrain...."

This law makes the standard exclusions for obscenity, libel, violation of privacy, and/or incitement of unlawful action.

For those of you who have not read the article, I assure you none of these exceptions apply. These students' expressions are consistent with the highest standards of English and journalism. They are compassionate and intelligent. In fact, if one of my kids had published something this well-written, I would know that public education was doing more than an outstanding job.

This matter is really quite simple. These students have the right to free speech. They are to be commended for their sensitive, responsible, and articulate exercise of such. Their principal, Mr. Engeln, is to be congratulated on his support and protection of these students' basic rights.

We have obtained a copy of the revised school publications code. We are concerned that this document is marked "Accepted Nov. 1996". Citizens Project and I oppose this or any revision of District policy which interferes with or abridges students' rights to free speech. Such revision is tantamount to

governmental promotion of or preference for one religious denomination. This is clear violation of constitutional law. (Citizens Project would be happy to participate in or coordinate formation of an ad-hoc committee to investigate this issue in a more responsible manner.)

Even though the subject matter of these articles is not the issue here, it is the subject matter which has created controversy. Therefore, I must add this personal note. I am Jewish. My family experienced bigotry from a teacher and cover-up by a principal when my daughter entered first grade at a D11 school. I am thankful for the district policy dictated by reason and balance which enabled me to deal effectively with the situation my family encountered.

As a Jew, I cannot remain silent in the face of hatred and intolerance toward any group. In fact, Judaism teaches that if you do not respect your fellow humans, you are unholy no matter how much you pray. Gay students are our children, too. District policy must enable them and their families to deal effectively with the situations they encounter. District policy must protect the rights of all of our children. You, as our elected leadership, must devise and uphold policy that respects difference, that protects the rights of minorities as well as majorities. And we must all speak out against the rhetoric of intolerance that just never seems to abate in our community.

Every compliance with the forces of hate diminishes us and weakens the texture of our community. Our bond issue is an example of the power we have when we truly beat our swords into plowshares and work together for the benefit of all of our children. Let us not forget that that is our mission.